

Pollster: Putin's Attractiveness Sagging 'Irreversibly'

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A banner from a recent opposition protest reflects opposition fears that the Putin-Medvedev tandem will never relinquish power.

The head of independent pollster the Levada Center said President Vladimir Putin's attractiveness to the public is not only shrinking, but the damage is irreversible.

In public perception, "the image of Putin is fading steadily and irreversibly," Levada Center director Lev Gudkov told Kommersant in an article published Thursday.

Putin still remains the most trusted politician in the country, but his ratings in terms of personal qualities have dipped. Gudkov said these factors often give a more accurate indication of public sentiment because when asked directly about support for a politician, people generally give the "correct" answer.

A May 15 poll showed that, since Putin first became president in 2000, his ratings have dropped from their peaks near the end of his second presidential term to 2000 levels or lower.

In the recent poll, 39 percent of Russians said they considered a strong suit of Putin to be that he is "business-like" ("delovoi"), compared to 49 percent in 2000 and 62 percent at the end of his second term. Likewise, the portion of those polled who named "well-educated" ("obrazovannost") as one of Putin's strong qualities dropped from a peak of 52 percent to 28 percent, and "cultural refinement" ("intelligentnost") to be another from 43 percent to 18 percent.

Even his most prominent qualities are losing their appeal. The percentage of Russians who see the president as "strong-willed and courageous" has dropped to 18 percent from its peak at 34 percent four years ago, and those who see "leadership qualities" and "pleasant and charming" ("priyatny/simpatichny/obayatelny") as strong attributes of Putin has dropped from 41 to 28 percent, and 32 to 7 percent, respectively.

Additionally, only 11 percent said they didn't believe Putin was guilty of the abuse of power alleged by political opponents.

The only way for Putin to regain this lost ground would be an "image reset" for the president, which would require him to become even more liberal than Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, general director of the International Institute for Political Expertise Yevgeny Minchenko told Kommersant.

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